

The rock struck against the stone seat where the Emperor had been standing a quarter of a second before and smashed the seat into fragments. But for the hermit, the Emperor would have been killed.

He gave him his hand and said, simply:

"Thank you."

The officers flocked round him.

"It's nothing, gentlemen. . . . We have escaped with a fright . . . though it was a fine fright, I confess. . . . All the same, but for the intervention of this worthy man . . ."

And, going up to the hermit:

"What is your name, my friend?"

The hermit had kept his head concealed in his hood. He pushed it back an inch or so and, in a very low voice, so as to be heard by none but the Emperor, he said:

"The name of a man, Sire, who is very pleased that you have shaken him by the hand."

The Emperor gave a start and stepped back. Then, at once controlling himself:

"Gentlemen," he said to the officers, "I will ask you to go up to the chapel. More rocks can break loose; and it would perhaps be wise to warn the authorities of the island. You will join me later. I want to thank this good man."

He walked away, accompanied by the hermit. When they were alone, he said:

"You! Why?"

"I had to speak to you, Sire. If I had asked for an audience . . . would you have granted my request? I preferred to act directly and I intended to make myself known while Your Imperial Majesty was signing the book, when that stupid accident . . ."